

My Kingdom for a Cow

Other kids had dogs as pets. Or cats. My brother had goldfish. Me, I had cows. Thirty of them, mostly Holsteins, but one Jersey, one Guernsey, and a Red Swiss (her name was Beulah and she was not a friendly cow).

Keeping cows in our back yard would not have met with my mother's approval, but luckily for me my uncle kept the cows on his farm, which was just three fields and one creek away, walkable in twenty minutes. Easy for me to visit the cows every day.

Every chance I got, I visited my cousins and slept over at my aunt and uncle's. That meant that my cousins and I could help bring in the cows for their milking each morning and afternoon. I loved bringing in the cows (except for Beulah, who always hid in blackberry thickets or way, way up on the farthest hill next to the Osage orange tree).

I loved locking the cows in their stanchions, feeding them grain or hay, and milking them. I didn't like shoveling manure that much, but manure was part of the whole cow deal. Cows were warm and smelled good: I loved leaning against them, my head nestled into their neck or flank.

Truth be told, I probably wanted to be a cow. I say that because I used to lick the same salt blocks the cows licked. Gross to think about it, but it didn't taste gross at the time. Just salty.

Eventually, the cows and I parted ways: I went off to college, they stayed behind. But cows shoved their milky way into my consciousness, because many years later, while driving back to Ohio one very hot, almost-100-degree day, I noticed cows standing in the shade of a billboard that had been erected in their field, and out of nowhere, a poem called to me. Mooed, probably. I scribbled it down at the first oasis. It went like this:

Paradise

In Farmer's pasture
stands a billboard
picturing palm trees and beaches
with water the color of jade.

On days so scorching
that milk will curdle,
we bunch up behind it
to rest in its shade.

Cows do indeed bunch together. In herds. And, at least for me, poems bunch together. In subjects. No sooner had I written that one, single cow poem than a whole barnful of them were mooing at my door. Like this one:

Naming Names

Beulah, Daisy, Myrtle —
Farmer has *noooooooo* imagination!

Hortense, Gertie, Ethel —
Farmer is *sooooo* behind the times!

As he talks to us
we chew, we moo,
we nod our heads
at each drab name.

After the milking is done and Farmer
is gone, we call to each other —

Whitney, Chelsea, Sierra!
Jessica, Caitlyn, Tiara!

So, I've put a collection of these poems together into a children's book and titled the manuscript *Views from the Pasture*. I hope it gets published some day soon . . . before the cows come home.